



**Administration Committee**  
**Final Report**  
**November, 2000**

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Association of Washington Tribes

Judie Stanton  
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## Blue Ribbon Commission Administration Committee

*This administration committee report is a work product developed by the consulting team for review and discussion by the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation. The contents are intended to provide commission members with a discussion of the committee's recommendations. This report should be reviewed in the context of the committee's meeting summaries, issue papers, findings report, and options report. Together, the materials represent a comprehensive overview of the administration committee's work.*

### SUMMARY

#### CENTERPIECES AND TOOLS

The administration committee is recommending four key areas for change in the administration of transportation programs and projects: benchmarks, governance, efficiencies and permitting. These are the centerpieces of our draft recommendations. Our other recommendations support and strengthen these centerpieces, and can be used by all levels of government to improve current methods of doing business. These other recommendations comprise the 'toolbox.'

**Benchmarks:** Key to accountability is the concept of "guided by goals, measured by results." To achieve that, the administration committee recommends adoption of a set of statewide benchmarks as proposed by the benchmarks committee. We recommend that the Blue Ribbon Commission's transportation benchmarks be formally adopted by the state, and that they continue to be monitored. Monitoring could be done by an oversight board, which may be a new entity or a modification of the Washington Transportation Commission. This board would also be responsible for setting new benchmarks and monitoring performance.

We support the adoption of benchmarks for administration, operations & maintenance, and construction. To achieve that, we recommend a thorough review of administration practices at all levels of government; we also recommend that consistent methods of collecting data and cost accounting be developed across all levels of government so that fair comparisons can be made, and sufficient detail be made available.

**Governance:** We recommend that the transportation system be managed by a 'Strong State, Strong Region' combination. At the statewide level we recommend that a single point of accountability be established to monitor accomplishment of benchmarks and cost-effectiveness standards across the state. A 'strong state' model will also necessarily provide the financial capacity to sustain and expand the state system. To supplement the strong state transportation role, we recommend that flexible authority be given to regions to determine their own priorities and to plan for, finance, and implement transportation projects. Strong regions will contribute their share to building and maintaining the statewide transportation system. Some regions may have no need to change existing

governance structures. These areas, which may be non-metropolitan in nature, may instead need the assurance of continued state involvement in the maintenance and preservation of an integrated statewide transportation system throughout all areas of the state.

**Efficiencies:** We recommend that efficiencies be instituted in all aspects of the transportation system including administration, operations & maintenance, and construction. To achieve administration efficiencies we emphasize the institution of a strong benchmark that would insist that all transportation agencies be in the best quartile of agencies across the country in controlling administrative costs as a share of overall agency costs. In operations & maintenance, we have found that many agencies across the state and country have reduced O & M costs through workplace improvements, improved materials, managed competition and other tools. Construction efficiencies include DOT's recent reduction in preliminary and construction engineering costs from 26% to 20% of hard construction costs, a target we recommend be extended statewide. Among a number of recommendations for construction efficiencies, a key is the utilization of alternative project delivery techniques such as design-build, which show promise for modest cost reductions and significant time reductions.

**Permitting:** Permitting for transportation projects is time-consuming, confusing, and inefficient. It does not always achieve the intended objective of environmental protection, and also can serve to drag out the time required to complete a transportation project, increasing its cost along the way. In Washington, the wetlands permit issued under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act is currently issued by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers. Our research shows that this is the most time-consuming of all permits required for transportation projects. Based upon the success of two other states, we recommend delegation of that permit authority to state government. We also recommend strategies to work toward the goal of achieving one-stop permitting.

**Toolbox:** Our remaining recommendations support the above key centerpiece actions. They are strategies that all levels of government can use to improve project delivery, or operations & maintenance efficiencies, or assist in the permit process. In some cases, we recommend continuation of existing efforts in a more coordinated fashion, and in other cases new ways of doing business. Toolbox strategies can be used singly or in combination with others, and new tools can be developed and shared as time goes on.

The recommendations below do not stand alone; rather, they are part of an overall package of recommendations and policies that includes investment strategies, as well as revenue proposals.

## ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH BENCHMARKS

### 1. Use and apply benchmarks to assess and monitor efficiency at all levels of government.

We believe that establishment of benchmarks is a cornerstone of government accountability at the state, city, county, and transit district levels. Since formation of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation in 1998, benchmarks have been at the forefront of the commissioners' discussions. With a focus on goals and results, benchmarks allow us to accurately quantify where Washington stands in comparison to other states. By giving a 'baseline' of current status, these measures can then be assessed for future action, and used as performance goals.

We recommend instituting the benchmark committee's work as the basis for an oversight board ('Transportation Accountability Board') or a restructured transportation commission. The goals must be measurable and used for continuous improvement, and can be aspirational, for example:

- o For the 2001 to 2003 biennial budget, transportation administrative costs would be below the national median;
- o For the 2003-2005 and subsequent biennia, transportation administrative costs would be in the top 25% most efficient of all the states.

We recommend that the recommended oversight board develop benchmarks or indicators for construction activity and maintenance costs.

### 2. Improve data collection and cost allocation.

Once benchmarks are established, it will be necessary to ensure that accurate data is collected and consistent measurements are used. The Joint Legislative Audit Review Committee (JLARC) audit was concerned that it is difficult to assess actual costs of WSDOT operations. The audit recommended changes to WSDOT's management and financial accounting systems to enable better review of project histories throughout all phases. WSDOT's performance could then be compared accurately to other states and other jurisdictions, and consistently analyzed against benchmark targets. The findings state that comparative figures are also difficult to come by at the local (city and county) levels. Without access to comparative data, it is not possible to measure accurately the cost and quality of services. Refining budget accounting and record system codes and guidelines can result in better analysis and reporting of operations and maintenance costs at city and county levels.

We recommend changes at the state, regional, and local levels to improve data collection and cost allocation, as follows:

- Accounting system differences: Refining budget accounting and record systems (BARS) codes can result in better analysis and reporting of operations and maintenance costs at city and county levels. WSDOT and localities use different methods of financial reporting and data collection, and comparative figures are thus not available. We recommend administrative changes that would bring transportation data collection (financial and contextual) at the state and other governmental levels (city, county, transit district at a minimum) into a consistent format for cost comparison purposes.
- Information collection: WSDOT, counties, and transit districts are required to collect and report data. Failure to report data can result in penalties or loss of

funding. However, while many cities also do collect data, there is no single place where that information for all of Washington's 279 cities is collected and no requirement for reporting that information. We recommend creation of state legislation that requires data collection and reporting at the city level, consistent with data collected at state, county, and transit district level, and reported to a single repository for simpler access.

- Definitions: agreement on the meaning of five terms —*administration*, *construction*, *maintenance*, *operations*, and *preservation* —must be made consistent across all levels of government in order to make correct comparisons. We recommend that the various levels of government come to agreement on the meaning of these transportation terms.

### 3. Conduct a thorough review of transportation administration practices.

We recommend a thorough review of administrative practices at the state, city, county, and transit district level. A complete review would achieve clarity of operational costs thorough a performance review of practices. It may also reveal areas of inefficiency. This option would require the Transportation Accountability Board to conduct a review no later than X (date). In particular, when focusing on WSDOT, the review should include the following:

- o Scale and size of accounting and management information systems division staffs.
- o Possible duplication of functions among regions.
- o Possible application of computer and Internet technology for administration purposes.
- o Scale and size of other WSDOT support programs, including program D, S, T, and U functions.

## GOVERNANCE

We believe that strengthening governance at the state and regional levels will result in a stronger and more integrated statewide transportation system. By first providing a single point of accountability at the state level, we will strengthen the role of the state in ensuring the accountability of the statewide transportation system. To supplement this accountability, we also recommend, in certain cases, a stronger role for regional government(s) in the provision of transportation services and projects.

Enhanced roles for the various levels of government will require additional support for funding critical statewide projects. The revenue committee will make recommendations on funding for these projects.

### 4. Change the role of the Transportation Commission to clarify accountability.

Three models for a transportation commission are given below. The first retains the existing commission in its current role. The second replaces the transportation commission with a transportation accountability board, created to be a single statewide point of accountability. The third option, a hybrid, keeps the policy and budget functions of the transportation commission, and adds accountability functions.

- a. Have the Transportation Commission be responsible for policy and budget, recommend legislation, and select DOT secretary. *(This describes the commission's current role.)*
- b. Change the role of the Transportation Commission to become a Transportation Accountability Board, which would be a single point of accountability for reporting or monitoring the performance of the state transportation system at all levels. This includes benchmarks and cost-effectiveness standards. Under this scenario, the governor would appoint the secretary of transportation, and the secretary would serve at the pleasure of the governor.

As an accountability board, this modified commission would adopt benchmarks and cost-effectiveness standards, report on the accomplishment of those benchmarks and standards, establish system standards for highways and other elements that are of statewide significance, evaluate and certify regional plans for compliance with the state system plan and statewide benchmarks, and review and recommend policy changes that would enhance the accomplishment of system goals.

- c. Have the Transportation Commission be responsible for its current functions (as described in a) as well as legislatively changing the role of the commission to a single point of accountability for reporting and monitoring the performance of the state transportation system at all levels, including benchmarks and cost-effectiveness standards (as described in b). Appointment of the secretary of transportation could be as described in either option a or b.

## 5. Change the selection process for the Transportation Commission.

In addition to the role of the commission, at issue is its composition. The current transportation commission is composed of seven members, three from Eastern Washington, and four from Western Washington. Two options are proposed:

- a. Keep the current seven-member composition and representation.
- b. Increase the size to a nine-member commission or board, with one representative from each of the state's nine congressional districts.

## 6. Provide regions with the ability to plan, select, fund, and implement or contract for implementation of projects identified to meet the region's transportation and land use goals.

### STRONG REGIONS SUPPORTING A STRONG STATE:

In our findings report, we noted that governance for transportation seems to work best when authority for planning, funding and implementing projects rests with a given body. We also observed that roadways frequently traverse several local jurisdictions, and a lack of governmental coordination in these corridors takes us further away from the goal of an integrated statewide transportation system. Further, we noted that existing forms of government, such as regional planning organizations, and other forms of regional governance already in place elsewhere, offer potential models for integrated decision-making.

A regional model of governance is actually a principle that allows decision-making and funding to occur closer to home, where the problems are understood best and the solutions can be implemented. Coordinated decision making and funding can permit regions to break through planning and funding barriers, and tackle immediate transportation problems, such as traffic congestion. The regional principle seems to be most applicable to the state's larger metropolitan areas, where the transportation issues are complex, transportation congestion is the worst, and the impetus for immediate action is present.

However, in our reading of public comments and in travels throughout the state, we noted that in parts of the state, particularly non-metropolitan areas, the problems are simpler and the existing governance structures function well. In these portions of Washington, the basic transportation needs transcend any need for governance changes. In order to maintain the integrity of the statewide transportation system, these regions simply need more money to fund transportation.

The committee recognizes that it is of paramount importance to maintain the integrity of the system, and that strong regions within a strong state system of transportation governance will help to maintain that system. We also recognize that different solutions will be necessary for different regions of the state —in some areas, governance changes will enable regions to tackle long-standing problems, in other areas, more money for maintenance and basic capital projects will solve the most critical problems.

### **PRINCIPLES FOR A REGIONAL AUTHORITY**

A regional approach to governance has the potential to improve transportation project delivery, from initial planning, through the funding and implementation phases. There are already fourteen regional transportation planning organizations (RTPOs) across the state providing planning services, so the beginnings of a system are already in place. However, the funding and implementation tools are not available to these organizations. We have seen the result: there is a huge disconnect between planning that goes on at the RTPO level and actual funding for transportation, for which these organizations have no authority. Only the legislature can solve the funding problem, either by direct appropriation, and/or by granting regions different funding capacities.

When the state's economy was based largely on agriculture and timber, a centralized form of statewide government was adopted. This has served us well, but as the state has urbanized, the transportation system built a half-century ago has not kept up with the complex growth of our state's urban areas. Two key points emerge:

- Simple planning and decision making in urban areas need to be strengthened.

- There is no reason to expect that the state's urban areas will receive large quantities of transportation funding from the rural areas; they will need to raise these funds themselves.

Therefore, we need to augment a strong state system with strong regional systems in those areas where it makes sense to do so. We propose that regions be empowered with regional funding sources, not only for high capacity transit, as exists today, but for general transportation needs.

Having regional money available to supplement state and federal money would allow a far more rapid response to growing congestion, and since money is a powerful magnet, would bring authority to regional planning and decision-making, which all too often ends at the theoretical level.

With a principle of "no new net bureaucracy," however, our intention is to simplify and minimize structural redundancy rather than to add new layers of government. A new regional entity would not be an existing organization in reconstituted form bringing "more of the same," but would bring fresh change to the way local and regional transportation projects are delivered. Establishing a regional authority could also create a logical and direct connection between planning and revenue, and could result in more realistic planning, fewer 'wish lists' of projects, and less 'peanut buttering.' Instead, a single entity would set priorities and fund projects across a region, directing efforts toward major chokepoints and regionally significant facilities.

The most effective regional agency will be truly multi-modal, responsible for roads, transit, and trip reduction strategies.

## **STRATEGY FOR A REGIONAL AUTHORITY**

### **POTENTIAL POWERS: PLANNING, FUNDING, IMPLEMENTATION**

The regional authority would have responsibility to program and prioritize state and regional funds for selected state and regional roadway projects and regionally significant transit projects within the region.

Merged functions of the new authority may also include air pollution control. Although substantial progress has been made in air pollution over the past generation, the quality of air in certain areas of Washington state (including Puget Sound, Spokane, Yakima, and Vancouver) has continued to decline, in large part due to emissions from automobiles and trucks. In Puget Sound particularly, projections indicate that, in the near future, increased vehicular emissions will contribute to violations of air quality standards, a loss of federal transportation funding, imposition of restrictions, and subsequent difficulty to attain permits for projects, and thus to attract new business. A regional authority may be responsible for monitoring this commission's indicator on air quality (among other things) to assess progress.

A revenue package would be developed to implement a regional transportation plan, and the authority would increase funding for the transportation system improvements through an improved allocation of state and new revenues. The authority would be able to contract with state, regional and local jurisdictions for construction and, where necessary, become the implementing agency. Other cost effective project delivery tools would be utilized, such as design/build and streamlined decision making.

### Decision-making

The governing board for the authority should include local and region-wide perspectives and may have a directly elected or a federated membership. The authority would set goals, objectives, and standards, and monitor achievement and performance as part of its planning and funding responsibilities.

Clear performance measures and cost effectiveness standards, aligned with any benchmarks established by a modified Transportation Commission, would be set early. Transportation plans would be submitted to the commission, which would certify that all planning principles are satisfied. The commission, in its report to the governor, would certify that the functions performed by the regional authority are contributing to the overall system.

### Facility scale or significance

The size of the project or investment to be undertaken by the regional authority should depend upon its significance to the region.

Standards for regional significance should be established for facilities; existing models are available via WSDOT's defined facilities of 'statewide significance,' and those facilities defined in the Puget Sound Regional Council's *Metropolitan Transportation Plan*.

## EFFICIENCIES

The overall goal is to restore faith in the ability of government to 'get the job done.' By fostering a 'culture of action' in administration, operations and maintenance, and project delivery, government will be able to set and meet its priority goals as established by the benchmarks, and regain the confidence of the general public. Our recommendations for construction and operations and maintenance efficiencies are given below. For administration efficiencies, please refer to the recommendations listed under "Accountability through Benchmarks."

## CONSTRUCTION/CAPITAL EFFICIENCIES

### 7. Reduce overall construction costs.

#### a. Reduce engineering/construction cost ratio.

WSDOT's preliminary engineering and construction engineering costs have recently been reduced from 26% to 20% of overall ('hard') construction costs. We recommend that cost savings such as these continue at all levels of government statewide.

#### b. Save money on materials and methods.

There are incentives to use innovative materials and methods, particularly when the private sector is involved in construction and operation of public rights-of-way. Examples include:

- o At the beginning of a project, develop a construction strategy, including lifecycle costing. Use value engineering when costing the project and its components — 80% of a project's cost can be found in 20% of the functional items.
- o To the extent possible, do simultaneous instead of sequential project phasing. Also, include utility work as part of the construction contract, or coordinate roadway projects with necessary utility work, enabling some costs to be shared.

- o Pre-purchase of some materials may be possible early in project development. This can save costs later. Also, the use of standardized project design for similar capital facilities can reduce overall costs.
- c. Use right-of-way 'banking.'  
Allow early purchase of rights-of-way, prior to completion of all environmental and other permitting, so that land is purchased before it becomes unaffordable.
- d. Continue to assess prevailing wage survey techniques.  
This option can reduce labor costs in some areas of the state, particularly non-metropolitan areas.
- e. Make mitigation more cost-effective.  
Document the amount spent on mitigation both for the permit process and for the actual mitigation required (measured as a percentage of overall cost); seek permit reform to reduce costs caused by process rather than substantive environmental protection.

## 8. Incorporate the design-build process and its variations into construction projects to achieve the goals of time savings and avoidance of costly change orders.

In design-build projects, a single entity is hired to carry out all phases of a project, from initial design to final construction. The advantages of design-build are derived from the collaborative effects of the designer-builder relationship, the potential for innovation and greater cost control. Examples in other states have shown modest savings in total project cost but even greater savings in the time of project delivery, which can be reduced by as much as one-third. For all transportation agencies to use design-build and its variations, greater authorization is required from the Legislature. We recommend that the Legislature grant authority to use design-build techniques and their variations to transportation agencies. We also recommend that methods by which public employees may participate in the design-build process be examined.

We also recommend increased education and training in alternative project delivery (ADP) concepts. There is a perceived lack of understanding on the part of public agencies, the legislature, and the public about ADP. Jurisdictions with expertise could assist in an education effort of appropriate departments and agencies, and encourage them to train outside entities.

Variations of design-build include:

- Design-build.
- Design-build-operate.
- Design-build-own-operate.
- Design-build-own-operate-transfer.
- General contractor/construction management.

## 9. Use the private sector to deliver projects and transportation services.

There is already private sector involvement in transportation capital construction costs, as WSDOT contracts with private construction companies to construct the state highway system. Greater involvement by the private sector would also allow private financing of capital projects. Some pilot projects allowing the private sector to provide expertise and

financing in developing transportation projects have been attempted in Washington. Using private funding, these projects can provide cost-effective transportation facilities, and the possibility of getting large-scale projects built when public funds are lacking. The public has demonstrated some distrust of for-profit operators of public facilities. Barriers preventing the private sector from providing transportation services should be examined in light of some public expressed interest in alternative services, which could include ferry, bus, or monorail.

## CONSTRUCTION/CAPITAL EFFICIENCIES TOOLBOX

### Improve project management.

There is a need to strengthen oversight and accountability for project delivery. This includes discipline to achieve project delivery targets. Incentives are needed to deliver projects in a shorter time. Require project managers to be involved in the final design phase of a project. Oregon has concluded that this approach brings a higher level of knowledge to projects and pays dividends during bidding and future project planning.

### Take measured (appropriate) risks.

Though risk-taking is not often associated with the public sector, assessing an appropriate risk can lead to decisions that improve a project's efficiency. Risk-taking in a large construction project recognizes the time value of money. The rewards of risk-taking include early completion, below cost completion, improved design. Pooling risks may make risk taking (and the potential for mistakes) more politically palatable. Agencies might not be rewarded or recognized for time- and/or money-saving risks taken.

### Use enhanced team planning/partnering.

Early involvement of all participants in a capital project, known as 'partnering,' has proven successful in building construction projects and can be used in transportation projects as well. Through partnering, early agreement on roles, responsibilities, dispute resolution, project and team scope, and mitigation measures is achieved, and consensus is built early in the development of the project. The result can be faster project delivery. Projects can benefit from participation of all interested parties early in the planning process. This can apply to interagency agreements as well, so roles are clear, redundant reviews eliminated, and decisions stick; however, the process can be time consuming and agreements are not binding.

### Do environmental review early.

Establish standards for environmental reviews that are consistent across jurisdictions. Begin at the preliminary project layout (or comprehensive plan phase) instead of waiting for initial project design. Allow environmental review to inform the design, which can result in a better overall project.

Where appropriate, involve the public early in the process, through the use of stakeholders committees and similar mechanisms.

## OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE EFFICIENCIES

10. Reengineer the workplace to achieve greater efficiency, and consider the use of managed competition for operations and maintenance functions.

The emphasis is on excellence in the workplace, through service, customer satisfaction, and a focus on results. Establish project teams, with an emphasis on setting goals and predicting outcomes. Encourage innovation among employees, using the WSDOT quality program model. Incorporate elements of total quality management into business practices. Form partnerships with labor organizations to develop apprenticeships and training programs to ensure the availability of a skilled workforce to deliver projects and services.

A stronger measure than workplace reengineering is to permit the use of managed competition for operations and maintenance functions. Under managed competition, private sector bids are sought for operations and maintenance activities, and then compared to a bid from the public sector staff currently performing the service. Legislative authorization would be required to permit managed competition. Alternately, because managed competition is very restricted under current state law, it may be best to introduce a pilot program, perhaps through mediation between labor and management.

11. Authorize and encourage jurisdictions to share resources.

This approach was successfully instituted in the neighboring cities of Kelso and Longview, Washington. Sharing of resources may include consolidation of overlapping functions, merging of departments, and sharing of equipment, personnel, and other resources, such as technology and practices. Additionally, this option may include establishment of a human resources skills bank of transportation professionals and, in conjunction with labor, development of a program that would allow state, local and regional transportation authorities to draw from skills bank during peak periods of need. Legislative authorization is required to permit sharing resources among jurisdictions and eliminate restrictions, such as changing traffic signal lights.

## PERMIT REFORM

12. Delegate 404 wetlands permit authority to the state.

### **DELEGATION OF PERMIT AUTHORITY TO STATE**

Section 404 of the Federal Clean Water Act regulates the placement of fill in waters of the United States, including wetlands. In most states, a permit must be obtained from the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (hereafter ‘the Corps’) for dredge and fill activities which result in the placement or redistribution of material in wetlands and other waters. The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (‘EPA’) administers Section 404 jointly with the Corps, and is responsible for program regulations. Section 404 is of interest because, in parts of Washington, the average time to acquire a permit under this process is 1 to 2.2 years.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ken Stone, WSDOT Olympia Region, presentation to Administration Committee, BRCT, March 24, 2000. Martin Palmer, WSDOT Northwest Region, telephone conversation September 25, 2000. Based on a sampling of WSDOT transportation projects.

Two states, Michigan (since 1984) and New Jersey (since 1994), have been authorized to administer the Federal Section 404 program in parts of their states.

**THE MICHIGAN AND NEW JERSEY EXPERIENCE:**

**Time savings** — State delegation has saved significant time in the 404 permit process: Michigan has a 90-day turnaround time for 404 permits, and New Jersey 180 days. In both states, the turnaround time is statutorily mandated. In Michigan, if the state has not acted by the 90-day deadline, a permit is automatically issued. In New Jersey, there is no automatic permit allowed if the 180-day deadline is not met. In both states, the ‘clock’ starts when a permit application is considered complete.

**Staff** — Both states have more staff people in more locations to review 404 permit applications than existed when the Corps had direct control over the program.

**Impact** — The delegation has positively affected the states’ programs through greater flexibility, more local decision-making, a higher degree of predictability, and more accountability. In both states, state control has allowed shorter permit turnaround times, as well as closer review of projects, and further delineation (mapping) of wetlands.

**Fees** — Both states charge permit fees for the 404 wetlands permit, though in neither state was the permit fee instituted to cover costs related to the delegation of authority since both states already had permit fees for a similar state program (which Washington does not have). In Michigan there are flat fees from \$50 to \$2,000, depending on the size and scope of the project. In New Jersey, the fee is dependent on the acreage of wetland to be filled, and for major projects is typically several thousand dollars.

**13. Work toward a goal of one-stop permitting, using a single permit application. Use existing models to create an agency with powers to consolidate permit review for major transportation capital projects.**

In the long run, the overall goal is to provide a single permit through a single environmental agency, or a blanket permit through a single point of contact. However, the numerous permits required for a large capital project are highly specialized, and require different areas of expertise. Possible approaches to begin to achieve ‘one-stop’ permitting include:

- Create permit centers with federal, state and local permit agency staff under one roof, using the existing pilot center in Lacey as a model.
- Simplify public notice requirements, coordinate across jurisdictions, and eliminate redundancies.
- Programmatic permitting.
- Expanded use of existing Joint Aquatic Review Permit Application (JARPA) — One permit can prevent inconsistencies and speed timelines.
- Early review — Review and coordination in the planning rather than the project phase can save time early in the process and lead to environmentally sound projects.
- Expand the liaison program, and make greater use of shared staff.

Each of these approaches already exists in various forms at the resource agencies.

14. Write and apply substantive standards for transportation (road) projects to streamline permit approvals thereby reducing process review delays. Identify highway projects of statewide significance to be eligible for review under this option.

Some pilot projects to consider might include:

- Select a significant highway project to plan and permit with an integrated steering committee that includes project proponents, elected officials, agency staff, and public representatives (like the Trans-Lake process).
- Evaluate the use of planning and permitting standards that encourage lower impact alternatives, such as Smart Growth, demand management (TDM), system management (TSM), pricing, and transit, along with the HOV and GP roads proposed in the project.
- o Accelerate the permit process for a project that uses low-impact development standards.

## PERMIT REFORM TOOLBOX

### Require early agreements.

- Require interagency agreements early in decision-making process.
- Provide early involvement by stakeholders.  
A model of early involvement could improve the NEPA process. Timetables would be established —no new issues, concerns, or lawsuits are permitted after the investment of substantial time and resources.
- Involve resource agencies early in planning, design, and critical area designation.

### Create project teams.

Representatives from each of the permitting agencies would be assigned to a project and see it through the process together. Designate a permit coordinator from the team.

### Coordinate mitigation across jurisdictions.

Work with local agencies and state agencies to coordinate review efforts. Work to inform federal agencies of the ongoing work of state, local, and regional bodies, and attempt to coordinate with federal agencies to the extent possible. A goal is to achieve delegated authority of federal review to responsible state, regional, or local authorities. Through the techniques made possible by advances in technology and knowledge, mitigation may be performed more strategically than before, over a broader geographic area and over a comprehensive range of projects and project types.

- Coordinate environmental mitigation strategies with other agencies. Coordinate with other federal, state and local agencies, and with non-governmental organizations to develop comprehensive strategies. Use geographic

information system (GIS) mapping to determine the most cost-effective and environmentally beneficial mitigation efforts.

- Use watershed based planning.  
Incorporate a holistic strategy for environmental mitigation, instead of project-by-project review. Create an overall program of watershed management that integrates environmental programs and decision making in a broad range of ecological areas, including wetlands, flood management, storm water, hazardous waste, aquatic sediments, fish and wildlife, erosion control, and stream restoration. Map the entire state using geographic information systems (GIS).

### Make better use of current environmental processes.

The following are methods of working better with available resources:

- o Better integration of NEPA/SEPA: to the extent possible, coordinate reviews at the federal, state and local levels.
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- o Fund staff in resource agencies to review permits: Staff shortages are a principal cause of delay in issuing environmental permits. Funding staff positions for specific projects or on an ad hoc basis will facilitate earlier project review.
- o Set and honor timelines.
- o Develop an environmental cost model to document and monitor the costs of environmental review, permitting, and mitigation on projects.